DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 180 543 JC 800 032

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TITLE A President's View of the Liberal Arts.
PUB DATE Jan 80
NOTE 8p.

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Adult Education: Basic Skills: *College Role: Community Colleges: Educational Needs; Educational Philosophy: Educational Trends: *General Education: *Individual Development: *Junior Colleges: *Liberal Arts

ABSTRACT

Liberal education, designed to produce character, comprehension, and compassion, has an important future in the community college scene. Of the six community college functions, only one is in the vocational area: learning skills development, general education, continuing education, guidance, and transfer education are largely liberal education components. Though a tightening job market and decreasing enrollment have created an emphasis on career-oriented programs, human beings will always need liberal education in their continuing effort to understand. Recognizing this, educators should focus on the true objectives of liberal education and reject the notion that it encourages lowered standards of excellence and the misuse of student freedom. Liberal education should: (1) help people become all they are capable of being, (2) help people to live with themselves, (3) develop insight, wisdom, and character, (4) develop psychologically mature adults, (5) encourage lifelong learning, (6) probe the problems of the late 20th Century, (7) provide non-classroom activities, (8) teach values as well as subject matter, (9) provide liberal arts curricula, and (10) infuse human values in technological and other areas. Such goals must be included in the community college mission if the community college is truly to be a teaching institution. (JP)

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A PRESIDENT'S VIEW OF THE LIBERAL ARTS

by

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JC 800 032

January, 1980

"A President's View of the Liberal Arts"

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January 1980

The question has been asked, "What is the place and/or the future of liberal education in the community college scene? Before an attempt is made to answer the question, it seems prudent to identify the functions of the community junior college. Thornton identifies six functions as follows:

1. The Development of Learning Skills
2. General Education (Liberal Education)
3. Continuing Education and Community Service
4. Guidance
5. Occupational Education
6. Education for Transfer[1]

The first three functions are clearly identified as liberal education; the fourth and sixth are largely in the area of liberal education, and the fifth, occupational education, is generally identified as education including courses of two years or less in the development of skills for entry into an occupation or to help the student progress on the job.

If it were possible to divide education into two distinct parts, vocational education and liberal education, it would be easier to define each. Vocational education develops competency in a calling.

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[1]James W. Thornton, The Community Junior College, John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1972, pp. 62-73.

Liberal education produces a person of character, comprehension, and compassion. Vocational education develops skills and knowledge for progress on the job. Liberal education is concerned with knowledge and virtue. Vocational education values utility. Liberal education emphasizes truth. In reality, vocational education is increasingly oriented to include liberal education and liberal education is becoming increasingly vocational.

Is the future of liberal education in trouble? Of course it is---it has always been in danger. Philosophers have long recognized that "to a starving man, bread is more important than philosophy." The tragedy of our times is that despite the fact that we have abundance in the United States, "occupational" goals of education have been stressed by the state legislators, the congress, and the majority of students and parents, as well as by many professional educators. As the job market tightened in the early seventies, students became seriously concerned about the marketability of their degrees. They directed their educational goals toward jobs and careers. With the decline in enrollments, colleges and universities have developed and emphasized career-oriented education. In the community colleges, the trend is toward job training and the hallmark of achievement is becoming narrower. Increasing numbers of students seek competency rather than the Associate of Arts Degree.

Throughout the history of civilization, an educational battle persisted bwtween those who would educate for immediate practical means and those who would recognize that the future of society is contingent

on taking the longer view. Don't despair, liberal education has a future. It is only through a liberal education that a civilized society can survive. Human beings will always strive to understand and liberal education is, in effect, the struggle, the striving, the effort to understand.

By now you, the members of academia, are no doubt asking, "Where do I fit in?" "What might I do?" "Where did I go wrong?" "Why are liberal arts colleges and liberal arts curriculum suffering?"

Regarding the decline in respect for liberal education, part of the problem has to do with those of us in the academic world who have responsibility for what liberal education has become in practice. Too often, we fail to remember that the goal of liberal education is to produce a person of character, comprehension and of compassion. We forget that liberal education is concerned with objectives including human motive, broad understanding, knowledge and virtue. We are careless in stressing that liberal education emphasizes truth.

Too often one hears the question, "What happened to student values?" Character, standards of excellence, vigor, decorum, values of dress and conduct, community regulations, responsibility, and competitiveness are values that have become badly fragmented. The vogue has moved to tolerance, "personal freedom," and autonomy. The college or university no longer accepts the responsibility of setting a vigorous, distinctive moral sanctuary for behavior. Federal restrictions on personnel practice and judicial rulings are eliminating the concept of

in loco parentis; majority status at age eighteen, the pill and the sexual revolution have created a new breed. The community college is asked to prepare students who at entry can't write too well, and don't read much better. We ask ourselves, is there no hope for excellence? Is there no place for a liberal education? The question might better be, "Are liberal arts educators fulfilling their obligations to liberal arts education?"

Perhaps it is now time to focus on some areas of education for which we have responsibilities:

1. Liberal education ought to fit people to live with themselves, to contribute to marriage, good citizenship and vocational success.
2. Liberal education should aim at helping people become all they are capable of being. It should be interested in the whole personality of the student.
3. Liberal education should dispense information for the purpose of developing insight, wisdom, intellect, will and character.
4. Liberal education should be concerned with the development of a mature individual---to prepare one not only to know what to have, but how to do without.
5. Liberal education should help us develop the desire as well as the talent to keep learning as long as we live.
6. Liberal education must drastically modify to deal with the problems and outlook of the late twentieth century.

7. Liberal education curriculums should have room for work-study programs, political activity, volunteer work, field experiences, independent study and travel.
8. Liberal education faculties should be interested in the student as well as in subject matter. They ought to teach values, and teach students to make distinctions to form discriminating judgments.
9. To be sound, curriculum for law, medicine, the ministry, must be built upon prerequisites in liberal arts education.
10. Liberal education should be concerned with human values and broad understanding. Without these scientific and technological advancements, chaos may prevail. For the same reasons, economic and political, social and managerial decisions must have liberal arts sources of reference.

More than any other segment of higher education, the community college is equipped to excel in liberal arts education. Teaching is the primary function of the community college faculty. Superior teaching is student-centered rather than subject-centered environment. Probably the best preparation a community college teacher can offer the lower division student in liberal education is a wide acquaintance with subject matter with the goal to develop a "responsible generalist." Despite this need, the curriculum of the community college is becoming proliferated and increasingly discipline oriented. Many faculty must re-evaluate their approach to teaching. They must not only accept responsibility for the

teaching of subject matter but must also give emphasis to the development of intellectual and moral growth of students.

Unless it has impact on the values, life, feelings, goals and deeds of the student, liberal arts curriculum has missed its purpose. It should come to grips with the great issues and the universal problems of our time. The student has a right to be repelled or turned off if material seems sterile and irrelevant, or if the professor is dull or lacks in motivation. The liberal arts are too exciting to be presented poorly.

If we are what we claim to be, "teaching" institutions---and we are---there is no limit to our opportunities to provide a liberal education to hundreds of thousands of potential students. If we do the job to the best of our ability, the audience will respond and democracy will be served.

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JAN 25 1980